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JAMES ABRAM GARFIELD.

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY

GEORGE DANA BOARDMAN,

SEPTEMBER 26, 1881.



AN ADDRESS

IN COMMEMORATION OF

JAMES ABRAM GARFIELD.

President of the United States.

DELIVERED IN THE MEETING HOUSE

OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA.

ON THE DAY OF HIS FUNERAL, AT CLEVELAND, OHIO,

SEPTEMBER 26, 1881.

BY GEORGE DANA BOARDMAN,
Pastor.



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ADDRESS.

AT high noon of Friday, the fourteenth day of April, 1865, the National Flag, which precisely four years before had been first traitorously struck down at Fort Sumter, was, by order of President Lincoln, re-uplifted on the spot of the original surrender. Recognizing the symbolical propriety of the President's order, we, at the same hour, gathered in this temple to commemorate the re-establishment of the National Flag. It was indeed an exultant scene. The church was gaily festooned, and in our music we blended the Star-Spangled Banner and the Battle-Hymn of the Republic, with the Triumphal Ode of Deborah. Alas!

Man, thou pendulum betwixt a smile and tear!

Late in the evening of that same Friday, our great President fell, the victim of the assassin's bullet. It was in the early days of telegraphy, and the joyous nation retired to sleep, unconscious of the mighty bereavement which had befallen them. How anguished

and terror-stricken we were when we read in the morning papers the following dispatch from Secretary Stanton :—" Abraham Lincoln died this morning at twenty minutes past seven."

Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen !
Then I, and you, and all of us, fell down,
Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.

The following Wednesday, we held here our memorial service, the gay festoons of Friday having given way to solemn drapery. Since then, sixteen eventful years have rolled away : and again, amid these emblems of grief, we are gathered to engage in the holy office for the dead. This tragic scene ; how like it is to that, and yet how unlike ! Like it, because there lies on his catafalque a second martyr President. Unlike it, because then the agony was sudden and tempestuous, only five days intervening between assassination and burial : whereas now the agony has been one of cruel suspense, eighty-seven days having wearily dragged between the murderer's shot and the martyr's death. Oh, this protracted, consuming anguish ; ever and anon, thank Heaven, relieved by moments of bright expectancy ; the nation's heart, like a mighty pendulum, oscillating between the Gerizim of hope and the Ebal

of dread. And now the pendulum has ceased to swing, hanging motionless amid the abyss of an unutterable woe. God of mercy, soothe our bursting hearts!

Assembled though we are to do honor to our illustrious President's memory, it is scarce fitting that I should detain you with biographical details; it is a part of Garfield's greatness, that they are already familiar to us, enshrined in our popular literature, our national archives, and our patriotic memories. How climacteric his career has been! How grandly it illustrates the potencies of our free institutions! Born in a log-cabin, in one of the dense forests of Ohio, a canal-boy, a struggling student, a president of a college, a major-general of volunteers, a congressional representative, a national senator, a President of the United States: James Abram Garfield stands to-day the world's idol-hero. How fitting to apply to him his own description of Abraham Lincoln, as answering to the laureate's portrait of a

Divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began,
And on a simple village green;
Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;

Who makes by force his merit known,
And lives to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne ;
And moving up from high to higher,
Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope
The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire.

But it is not my purpose to dwell on his eventful and brilliant career. I wish at this point to speak only of his personal character. And a remarkable character it was. Not that it was faultless ; far from it ; he was but a man, and, like the best of men, he had his share of human defects and infirmities. But he was President of fifty millions of people ; and, better still, he, in virtue of his own mental and moral worth, was fit to be their president. Let me then attempt a rapid portrayal of his personality.

It was his good fortune to inherit from his robust ancestry a vigorous bodily constitution. Stalwart in frame, athletic in action, temperate in habits, he was enabled to grapple with the misfortunes of poverty, the hardships of military life, the strains of civic strife, and at last, how heroically we know, to close in for eighty days with that ghastly foe at whose adamantine feet we all must lie.

His mental endowments were many and rich. Swift in insight, keen in observation, patient in investigation, subtle in discrimination, calm in reasoning, cautious in conclusion, clear in judgment, broad in comprehension, affluent in memory, sagacious in planning, weighty in counsel, delicate in humor, rich in imagination, æsthetic in sensibility, fluent in utterance, perspicuous in diction : these native gifts were enriched by the most sedulous culture. Born with an intense thirst for knowledge, he spared no pains to inform himself in all possible directions, revelling in all varieties of intellectual toil. An adept in the languages, classic and modern ; a connoisseur in the arts ; a devotee of the higher poetry ; a master in political history, and constitutional law, and fiscal science, and social economy, and the civic problems generally :—President Garfield was, in an eminent sense, our Scholar-Statesman.

In the range of the social instincts and faculties, he was also pre-eminent. Dignified and courteous in demeanor, he was at the same time and in an intense degree a companionable man. Blithe in spirit, affable in manner, catholic in sympathy, conciliatory in temperament, sensitive to all signs of goodness in his friends, generous in his interpretation of those who differed

from him, profoundly affectionate; he was a dutiful son, a loving husband, a fond father, a beloved neighbor, a sturdy friend, a chivalrous foe. Few men have ever lived endowed with such magnetic power of friendship: witness the enthusiastic love of his college-classmates; the deep attachment of his neighbors; the tender devotion of his personal, and military, and political friends, and even his political foes; the pathetic, unwearied vigil and ministry of his Cabinet, his physicians, his nurses, his domestic servants; the tears of a nation. It is the domesticity of his character, his capacity for the home feeling, which is one of the secrets of the universal and poignant grief.

But it is in the range of the moral faculties that our lamented President shone the brightest. On the occasion of the reception tendered him by the Legislature of Ohio, in honor of his election to the United States Senate, he used words so quaint and yet so pregnant that I must quote them:—

“During the twenty years that I have been in public life, almost eighteen of it in the Congress of the United States, I have tried to do one thing. Whether I was mistaken or otherwise, it has been the plan of my life to follow my conviction at whatever personal cost to myself. I have repre-

“sented for many years a district in Congress whose approbation I greatly desired ; but though it may seem, perhaps, a little egotistical to say it, I yet desired still more the approbation of one person, and his name was Garfield. He is the only man that I am compelled to sleep with, and eat with, and live with, and die with ; and if I could not have his approbation, I should have had companionship.”

Golden are these words, alike in themselves and as the key to President Garfield's moral career. Endowed with a sensitive conscience, he was instinctively observant of ethical proprieties or moral decorum. Endowed with a keen sense of duty or moral obligation, he had the courage of convictions, gallantly defending the oppressed, stoutly championing the policy of honest money, bravely urging the duty of civil service reform. Endowed with a delicate sense of personal honor, he was a man of public and private rectitude, one of those rare civilians who, as the Laureate sings of the Iron Duke :—

Never sold the truth to serve the hour,
Nor palter'd with Eternal God for power.

Endowed with the worshipful instinct, he had a natural reverence for all that is morally great ; he was a

devoted Christian, and, like the great Michael Faraday, worshiping with the little company of Sandemans, he bravely avowed and maintained his fellowship with the feeble, obscure Church of the Disciples. In brief; endowed with a signal capacity for conceiving and cherishing ideals, he was an ideal student, an ideal citizen, an ideal statesman, an ideal president, an ideal friend, in one word, an ideal man. Here is the real secret of these unparalleled demonstrations. It was not merely because he was the President of fifty millions of freemen; it was chiefly because, through the elective grace of our sovereign God in ordering his unique character and career, he was among these fifty millions the signal man; this is the secret of the countless telegrams of sympathy; the national, pathetic vigil of eighty days; the solemn, reverent conveyance to Long Branch; the touching tributes of queens and kaisers; the universal ebon drapery; the bowing millions as the illustrious dead is being reverently borne to his sleeping-place. The secret of the nation's and world's lamentation is this: We have lost a President who was a CHRISTIAN MAN. And he has won his reward. "How many more stations," quaintly asked the distinguished, weary sufferer of his physicians,

“must I stop at before I reach home?” None, illustrious, Christian, Garfield! Thou, after many a heroic struggle, hast, by the grace of God, “scaled the toppling crags of duty,” and, at last, reached thy home-station, even the Paradise of our God.

Here, my countrymen, I stay my tribute. Feeble though it is, it is sincere. Nor can I close this part of my address more appropriately than in the words of our lamented hero, at one of the anniversaries he celebrated with his comrades of the Civil War:—

“We hold reunions, not for the dead; for there is nothing in all the earth that you and I can do for the dead. They are past our help and past our praise. We can add to them no glory; we can give to them no immortality. They do not need us; but forever and forevermore do we need them.”

But it is not right that we separate without seeking to learn some of the lessons which our Father would teach us in this awful bereavement. Again let me quote from the late President. On the day that Congress assembled to offer their tribute to the memory of President Lincoln, Representative Garfield, in the course of his address, spoke as follows:—

“O, Sir, there are times in the history of men and nations,

“ when they stand so near the veil that separates mortals and
“ immortals, time from eternity, and men from their God, that
“ they can almost hear their breathings and feel the pulsations
“ of the heart of the Infinite. Through such a time has this
“ nation passed. When two hundred and fifty thousand brave
“ spirits passed from the field of honor through that thin veil
“ to the presence of God, and when at last its parting folds ad-
“ mitted that martyred President to the company of the dead
“ heroes of the Republic, the nation stood so near the veil
“ that the whispers of God were heard by the children of men.”

Prophetic words these. Again the veil has parted, and through it has passed another martyred President. Again the Lord God of hosts whispers to us. Hear, then, O my countrymen, what the Lord our God is saying to us out of the whirlwind.

And, first, His summons to amendment. Fitly does the President, in his proclamation, call this a day of public humiliation and prayer. There is a multitude of sins for which we, as a nation, should be deeply penitent.

Let me at this point specify one sin which has been brought into painful prominence by the tragedy at Washington: it is the thirst for office. Not that it is necessarily wrong to indulge in schemes of patriotic

ambition. The career of our lamented President, conceiving and cherishing for himself in early life a lofty ideal of an official vocation, and toiling to fit himself in every possible way for the great tasks of statesmanship, is a splendid instance of an honorable ambition. Would God that the young aspirants of our nation were seized by a like exalted ideal ! Alas, it is far otherwise. There is a selfish, ignoble, insane thirst for office ; not because it is a means of profiting others, but because it is a means of profiting the occupant, a means of personal emolument, or respectability, or indolence. I know not how this national monomania can be cured, except by an entire revolution in respect to political patronage, or distribution of public spoils. It is right that the President should be elected by a party ; in fact, practically speaking, there is no other way of electing him. But it is not right, and therefore not safe, that, when elected, he should be the President of a party. The moment that he ascends the Chair of State, he must forget that he was a Republican or a Democrat ; henceforth he must be an American, knowing neither East nor West, neither North nor South, neither political friend nor political foe. But so long as the American people concede to him the right to apportion

a hundred thousand offices to his hungry political friends, you will have, and cannot but have, a party President. He may be the best of men, even glorious James A. Garfield himself; but he must, in spite of that same self, be more or less a partisan Executive. If he is a bad man, he will of course appoint bad men, apportioning the public booty according to his personal whim, or the so-called "honor" of political bandits, or the stipulations of ignoble, preconceived arrangements. If he is a good man, he will either be harried to death by importunity and anxiety, or he will become the target of the personal hate of a quarter of a million of disappointed partisan applicants. I am not a statesman, and therefore am not conceited enough to dictate the method of cure. I am only a citizen, and therefore beg to suggest, in all modesty, what is by no means original, that the common-sense method of cure would seem to be this: In case of vacancy, by death or otherwise, official appointment according to civic ability, as determined, say, by competitive test; and official promotion according to proved success: all this, of course, being independent of party affiliations or obligations. For public officials, not less than physicians, or sea-captains, or engineers, need experience. Happy the day when

the President of the Republic shall be permitted to administer the government according to the fidelity of the official, not according to the partisan obligation or personal whim of the Executive. Listen then to God's voice as He speaks to the American people by the open grave of our noble President, assassinated by a disappointed office-hunter.

But the mad thirst for office is by no means the only or chief sin of our nation. There are, for example, the sins of official corruption and bribery; the abuse of trusts; the greed of riches; the struggle for display; selfish injustice and oppression; devotion to temporalities, or the lower side of our nature; intemperance; profanity; haughty self-confidence; indifference to God's commandments; neglect of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Saviour; in brief, practical atheism. Verily, to us and to our princes and to all Israel, near and far off, belongeth confusion of faces, because of our trespasses that we have trespassed against the Lord. And therefore the Lord God of our fathers would, by this terrible calamity, wherein He has snatched from us—

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,

call us back to penitence and amendment of character,

national and personal. For mere patriotism, my countrymen, will not save us. We must dig down deeper than love of country, if we would find the foundations on which to build an everlasting empire. Think not that our glorious past or our peculiar and signal natural advantages will ensure us lasting prosperity. Recall the history of the Jews. The most privileged of nations has become the most afflicted. What though we Americans have had a magnificent career? Vain the splendor of our history, the heroism of our fathers, the republican form of our government, the perfection of our written Constitution, the boundlessness of our resources, the indomitableness of our energy, the intensity of our patriotism; all is in vain, unless we turn to the God of our fathers, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. For the nation that knows of the Lord Christ, and bows not the knee before Him, is the nation which the Lord Christ will, sooner or later, grind into powder. Hear, then, O American Israel, what the Lord God is saying to us out of the whirlwind.

Secondly.—God's summons to thankfulness. For even amid these appalling shadows there is more than one gleam of heaven's own light.

And, first, let us thank God for the President's character as it has been revealed, and, if I may so say, even forced out into involuntary, unconscious disclosure by the terrible compression of his tragic environment. The admirable, unbroken poise which he maintained amid sudden assault and abruptly impending death; the loving thoughtfulness with which, amid an excitement and consternation so intense as to unnerve the bystanders, he, while still prone and anguished in the station, dictated to his absent, invalid wife, a dispatch which will be enshrined in literature as a model of considerate delicacy and affectionate pathos; the magnanimity which no torture consequent on his assassin's brutality was able to ruffle; the dignified, unaffected simplicity with which he received the elaborate attentions of great officials, and the stately tributes of foreign potentates; the patience with which he bore his intense and protracted pangs; the calm resignation with which he accepted whatever cup the Father might have given him to drink; the unfaltering trust in God and countrymen, and republican institutions; the dauntless, tireless bravery with which he, a disabled and prostrate sufferer, in simple love of family, and country, and God, for eighty days fought back on every side the advan-

cing hordes of death: these are some of the things which have sent a thrill of admiration throughout the world, welding all parties and all civilized nationalities into one serried phalanx around him, alike his devoted ministrant and his proud body-guard.

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

For, and none would be swifter or gladder to assert the truth of the declaration than our noble President and his illustrious wife themselves, there are all over Christendom thousands of sufferers as heroic as he whom we lament to-day. But they "suffer and grow strong" in less conspicuous abodes: the tragedies of their sick homes are unbulletined: whereas, James Abram Garfield was lifted by his countrymen to the nation's loftiest pinnacle, and therefore was the object of universal gaze. Thank God, he endured the scrutiny well. In his patient, trustful bravery, God's providence has permitted him to become the radiant type of whatever is noblest in our common humanity. Let us thank God then for our President's character.

Again: Let us thank God for the revival of patriotism. It may be that the return of peace and prosperity had made us somewhat less mindful of our patriotic

obligations than was our wont in the dark days of the Civil War. But the moment the assassin's ball pierced the President's body, the nation felt that the ball pierced its own body politic. For the President of the United States, in simple virtue of the people's election of him to the Chief Magistracy, becomes for the time being, the nation's incarnate symbol. Accordingly, a blow struck at him is a blow struck at all of us. When, therefore, the President's stricken form fell prone in yonder depot, the nation instinctively felt that not only a foul murder, but also a sacrilegious treason had been attempted. The instinct of allegiance instantly burst into expression throughout the whole land, the South vieing with the North in demonstrations of loyalty, once more embracing each other in their mutual lamentations, even as ages ago Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob wept on each other's neck, before the open cave of Machpelah. Let us thank God then for the revival of the spirit of patriotism. For when that murderous shot was fired, the flame of patriotic devotion was re-kindled on our country's common altar, and the re-cemented American nationality determined, as only a free people can determine, to crush out every vestige and hint of treason, in whatever form it may dare to

show itself, whether in a disappointed office-seeker's pistol, a nihilist's bomb, or a politician's bribe. Long live the Republic!

Again: Let us thank God for the sudden universal outbursting of latent sensibilities. It may be that in our misanthropic hours we think poorly of our fellow-men, and wonder whether it might not be better if all of us were dead. But when a great sorrow touches the world's heart, and, unsealing its fountains, floats out its latent wrath, and grief, and prayer, and trust, in a colossal surge of sensibility, then do we suddenly awake to the sense that this great humanity of ours is, indeed, worth living for, and, if need be, worth dying for; and we again hear God's voice, as from out a whirlwind, summoning us to consecrate ourselves afresh to human amelioration, education, and moral up-building. It is good then that a great tide of pathos should ever and anon sweep over a people. And what a great tide of pathos has swept over ours. The sudden shock, the welling sympathy, the fervent supplication, the anxious vigil, the bewildering suspense, the solemn journey to the ocean side, the trans-atlantic condolence, the alternating dread and trust: and, at last, the uncontrollable grief, the mighty dismay, the

arrested London Exchange, the royal mourning, the bowing Christendom as the solemn cortege bears the revered relics to their last sleeping-place: has the world seen anything of the kind greater before? Let us thank God then even for our mighty sorrow,

This truth came borne with bier and pall,
I feel it when I sorrow most,
'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.

And if *our* hearts are so torn, what must be the despair of the stricken wife and children and mother! O God of mercy, Husband of the widow, Father of the fatherless, Staff of the aged, have pity on them!

Once more: Let us thank God for the abrupt, impressive manifestation of the religious instinct. In times of prosperity, we are apt to be proud and hard hearted and practically atheistic. But when the tempest beats high, and we feel our souls plunging into the pit, then we instinctively turn to the most high God, and out of the deeps we cry unto Him. What an impressive spectacle the angels have been beholding the last few weeks; prayerless houses suddenly turned into houses of supplication, a great nation on its knees before Almighty God. This well-nigh universal genu-

flection proves to me a great and sacred thing : Man is in the depths of his nature a religious being. In moments of solemn gravity, the instinct of worship is stronger than the wilfulness of skepticism ; and

So the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

And sorrow it is that has disclosed this reverent instinct. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. Ay, blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law : for whom Thou lovest Thou correctest, even as a father the son he delighteth in.

These then are two of the lessons of the hour : God's summons to amendment, and God's summons to thankfulness.

And now nought remains for us to do but to invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon him who has been so painfully summoned to the Chief Magistracy. Again I must quote from his lamented predecessor : In the memorable address he made in New York, at the time of the assassination of President Lincoln—how little he dreamed he was solemnly foretelling his own great tragedy !—he said :—

“Fellow-citizens! Clouds and darkness are round about Him! His pavilion is dark waters and thick clouds of the skies! Justice and judgment are the establishment of His throne! Mercy and truth shall go before His face! Fellow-citizens! God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives!”

Yes, Chester Allan Arthur! God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives. Be loyal to thy great office, and to him who preceded thee, and we will be loyal to thee. “According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee; only the Lord thy God be with thee, as He was with Moses.”

My countrymen, my tribute is ended. “God buries His workmen, but carries on their work.” Once more I must quote from our illustrious Chieftain. Offering his memorial tribute to Abraham Lincoln, he said:—

“I look forward with joy and hope to the day when our brave people, one in heart, one in their aspirations for freedom and peace, shall see that the darkness through which we have travelled was but a part of that stern but beneficent discipline by which the Great Disposer of events has been leading us on to a higher and nobler national life.”

Fit words these to be repeated of him who sixteen

years ago pronounced them. As in the days of King Joash, when the body of the dead Israelite, on being let down into the sepulchre of Elisha, and on touching the bones of the mighty prophet, was revived and stood on its feet again ; so may God grant that as the nation's dead heart reverently touches to-day the dead heart of our great patriot, it may be quickened into life again, and stand erect in all the strength and splendor of a new-born majesty.







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